

Hovhannes Tournian

**THE MASTER AND
THE LABOURER
•
NAZAR THE BRAVE**



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AND THE
LABOURER



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THE MASTER AND THE LABOURER

Once upon a time there lived two brothers, who were very poor. They decided that the older of the two should find work as a labourer for some rich landowner, and send his earnings home.

The younger brother stayed at home, and the elder went and hired himself to a rich master.

The agreement was that he should work until spring, until the first cuckoo called, but the master added a clause.

"If either of us gets angry with the other before then, he will pay a fine. If you get angry with me,

you will pay me a thousand rubles. If I get angry with you, I shall pay you a thousand rubles."

"But I have not the money!" exclaimed the labourer.

"That doesn't matter. If you lose, you'll stay on and work for me ten years without pay!"

At first the labourer wanted to refuse, but then he thought:

"After all, I can control myself and never get angry. If the master loses his temper, he'll have to pay me a thousand rubles. What can I lose?"

He accepted.

Early the next morning the master sent him to work in the fields.

"Take a scythe, and mow as long as there is light," he said.

The labourer toiled in the field all day long, and returned home in the evening completely worn out. The master said to him:

"Why have you come home so early?"

"What do you mean? The sun has set!"

"Well, and what of it? Didn't I tell you to work as long as there's light? The sun has gone down, but the moon is up, and there's quite enough light to work by."

Do you mean I can never rest?" cried the labourer.

"Aha — you are getting angry!"



No, no, not at all... Only I'm very tired... I'll just rest a bit, and then go out the field again."

He worked all night till the moon went down. But then the sun came up again. The poor man sunk down exhausted. He began to curse his master.

"Curse your field, and your bread, and your money," he cried.

At that moment the master came up to him, and said:

"So you *are* angry! Don't forget our agreement. Now you either pay me a thousand rubles, or you work for me without pay for ten years."

The labourer didn't know what to do. He had no money, but he couldn't go on working for such a harsh master. Finally he signed a paper stating he owed the master a thousand rubles, and went home empty-handed.

His younger brother asked him what had happened, and he told the whole story.

"That's nothing. Don't worry," said the younger brother. "Now you stay at home, and I'll go and find work."

He went to the same master his brother had worked for.

The master offered him the same conditions. If the labourer got angry, he was to pay the master a thousand rubles, or work ten years without pay.

If the master got angry, he was to pay the labourer a thousand rubles, and let him go free.

"No, that's not enough," said the younger brother. "Let's make it two thousand rubles you pay me if you get angry, and two thousand rubles I pay you if I get angry—or work twenty years for you without pay!"

"Agreed!" cried the master eagerly, and took the man into his service.

The next morning the sun was already high, but the master found the labourer still fast asleep.

"Get up this minute! It's nearly noon, and you're not at work yet!"

"Are you angry?" asked the labourer, suddenly opening his eyes.

"No, no—not by any means!" answered the master hastily. "I was merely suggesting it was time for you to start mowing that field."

"Oh, there's time enough for that," replied the labourer lazily.

Finally he got up and began leisurely pulling his boots.

"Can't you hurry up a bit?"

"Why, are you getting angry?"

"No, no—I merely wanted to say that you'd be late for work."

"Oh, well, that's different. But remember our agreement—you must carry it out, you know."

By the time the labourer was ready and reached the field, it was nearly noon. „What's the use of working now? It's too late. Look, everybody's having their lunch. Let us eat too," said the labourer.

They sat down and ate. After they had finished, the labourer said: "I'm a working man. I need to have a short nap to keep up my strength." With that he went to sleep and slept until evening.

"Here, wake up! Have you no shame? cried the master, shaking him. „All the neighbours have finished mowing their fields, while ours stands there untouched! What a fine worker you are!"

"Seems to me you're really angry this time!" said the labourer, raising his head.

"No, no, not at all. I was merely telling you it was time to go home now."

"Well, that's different. Let's go home then."

When they reached the house, the master found a guest waiting for him. He sent the labourer to kill a sheep so they could prepare a meal for the guest.

"Which sheep shall I kill?" asked the labourer.

"Any you can catch," said the master.

Off the labourer went. Soon afterwards the neighbours came running to the master, and said: "Your worker must have gone mad; he's killing all your sheep!"

The master ran out the house, and saw his entire flock lying there slaughtered.



"What have you done, curse you?" he yelled.
"You've ruined me! May the Lord punish you!"

"But you told me yourself to kill any I could catch, and I caught them all!" answered the labourer blandly. "Can it be that you are angry?"

"No, no, not at all. I am merely sorry that you killed all my sheep."

"All right, then. If you are not angry with me, I can go on working for you," said the labourer. He continued to work for a few months, nearly driving his master mad with his tricks. Finally the master decided to get rid of him.

According to the terms of their agreement, the worker was to stay until the first cuckoo called in the forest. The master decided he would make use of this clause. However, winter was only beginning, and it was a long time until the cuckoo would be heard, so he took his wife with him to the woods. He helped her climb a tree, and told her to sit there and call out as a cuckoo would. Then he went home, and told the labourer they would go hunting together in the forest.

As soon as they entered the woods, the master's wife began to call out, "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" The master turned to the labourer, and said, "Congratulations! There's the first cuckoo and now you are free again!"

The labourer saw through the trick.

"No," he said "How can a cuckoo make itself



heard in the beginning of winter? It must be a very strange sort of cuckoo indeed. I'm going to shoot it, and take a good look at it!"

With that he raised his gun and aimed at the tree in which the master's wife was perched.

The master threw himself upon the labourer and tried to wrest the gun from him. "Curse you, you bandit! I can't stand your tricks any longer!"

"Ah, now you'll admit that you really are angry at last," cried the labourer eagerly.

"Yes, yes, I'm angry! I admit it!" said the master. "Come along, I'll give you your two thousand rubles, only go away and leave me in peace. Now I understand the old proverb that says, 'Never dig pitfalls for others, you might fall into them yourself!'"

And the younger brother went home with thousand rubles in his pocket.

1908





NAZAR THE BRAVE

1

Once upon a time there lived a peasant, whose name was Nazar. He was lazy, good-for-nothing, and cowardly, so cowardly that he was afraid to take a single step by himself. He was always hanging on to his wife's skirts; wherever she went, he would follow her. And people nicknamed him Nazar the Coward.

One night Nazar the Coward followed his wife out of doors. He stood outside the door, and seeing everything around lit up by bright moonlight, said:

"There's a night for you! Makes me long to attack and rob the caravan that goes from Hindustan to the Shah's city and fill our house with riches!"

"Be quiet, you fool! To think of a coward like you even daring to speak of robbing caravans! Get back to bed and stay there!"

Nazar began to scold her.

"That's just like you, you foolish woman! Now you're preventing me from robbing the Shah's caravan and filling our house with riches! Am I a man or aren't I? How dare you argue with me!"

Seeing his temper was up and he would not calm down, his wife ran back into the house and locked the door.

"Go on, rob the Shah's caravan, if you can, old chicken-heart!" she sneered.

Shut out in the yard, Nazar stood with his heart in his mouth.

"Let me in! Please, let me in!" he begged.

But she wouldn't. He pleaded with her in vain for some time. Finally he gave up, and squatted against a wall and waited shivering until morning.

The night passed and morning came, and Nazar lay dozing disconsolately in the sun, waiting for his wife to let him in. It was summer and there were

flies everywhere. They settled on Nazar's face in swarms. At first he was too lazy to make the effort to raise a hand and swat them, but in the end he could bear it no longer, and slapped his forehead. Dead flies dropped all around him.

"Aha" muttered Nazar, "how many of them have I killed, I wonder?"

He began to count the dead flies, but soon lost count.

"Anyway, there must be at least a thousand," he mused. "Never knew I had it in me! If I can kill a thousand creatures with a single blow, I'm sure I can get on without my wife!"

He got up and went straight to see the village priest.

"Father, give me your blessing."

"God bless you, my son," said the priest.

"It's like this, father," Nazar began and went on to tell the priest about his feat, adding that he must leave his wife, and asking the priest to write down his feat so that it would not remain unknown and everyone might read and know about it.

As a joke, the priest wrote down on an old rag:

"Nazar the Brave, who fear does not know,
Kills a thousand with a single blow!"

He gave the rag to Nazar, who fixed it to a long pole, buckled on a rusty old sabre, mounted his donkey and rode out of the village.



2

Nazar rode along, not knowing where he was going. After a while he looked back and saw that the village lay far behind and was afraid again. He began to hum, sing, talk to himself and shout at the donkey, just to keep his courage up. He shouted louder and louder, and finally the donkey began to bray in

answer. On they went, the one shouting and the other braying louder and louder. All who heard them were scared. The birds flew away, the hares scampered into the forest, and the frogs jumped croaking into the water.

But when they rode into the forest Nazar was even more afraid than before. It seemed to him that there was a wild animal or a robber lurking behind every bush and tree, ready to pounce on him. He now began to yell as loud as he possibly could, enough to strike fear into the heart of anyone who might hear.

And, indeed, it so happened that a peasant from a neighbouring village was walking along the road towards them through the forest, leading his horse by the reins. When he heard the terrific din, he began to quake and crying, "Woe is me! Robbers!" ran to hide in the woods, leaving his horse on the road.

Nazar reached the spot where the man left his horse and saw the riderless horse standing there all saddled and bridled. What more could he have wanted? He straightway dismounted from his donkey, climbed on the horse and rode away.

3

How far Nazar rode on, whether a long way or a short way, is only known to himself, but at length he

came to a village. He had never been there before, and knew not where to go. Suddenly he heard music. Riding towards it, he found many people gathered for a wedding feast.

“Greetings!”

“Greetings to you, stranger! Take a seat of honour, and be our guest.”

They seated Nazar at the place of honour, and brought him vast quantities of wine and food. The guests wondered who he could be. The man sitting on his right nudged his neighbour, who nudged the next man, and so the nudging passed all around the table until it came to the priest, who sat to the left of Nazar.

The priest looked at Nazar’s “banner”, and spelled out.

“Nazar the Brave, who fear does not know,
Kills a thousand with a single blow!”

The priest whispered this in awe to the men on his left, who whispered it to his neighbour, and so it went back around the table until it reached the guest sitting on Nazar’s right.

All were greatly impressed when they learned that their guest was no less than,

„Nazar the Brave, who fear does not know,
Kills a thousand with a single blow!”

Suddenly one of the guests, who was known as a boaster, exclaimed. “Why, of course! It’s Nazar the



Brave! How he has changed. I hardly recognised him."

Many of the others then began to remember Nazar the Brave, and tell stories of the great feats he had performed, not omitting to mention how long they had known him and the days they had spent together with him.

"How can such a great man travel without servants?" asked some people dubiously.

"Why, that's the way he is. He doesn't like to keep servants. He says, "Why should I have servants, when the whole world serves me?"

"Why does he carry such a rusty old sword?"

"Why, that just shows his bravery. With a good sword at his side, anyone can be brave enough, but Nazar kills a thousand with a single blow of that rusty old sword of his!"

All the guests drank to the health of Nazar the Brave, and one of the most important men present made a speech.

"The fame of your feats reached us long ago, O Nazar the Brave! And we are honoured to have you with us today!"

Nazar merely sighed, and waved his hand. The guests exchanged meaningful glances to show they understood the deep significance of that sigh and wave of the hand.

Then the ashugh rose, and sang a song in his honour.



**"Welcome to thee! We hail thy might
O great eagle of our mountains heights!
Crown and glory of our land, our light!
Nasar the Brave, who fear does not know,
Kills a thousand with a single blow!**

**"Champion of the weak, healer of the sick,
Our saviour from pain, woe and foul trick,
You defend from injustice the humble and meek!
Nazar the Brave, who fear does not know,
Kills a thousand with a single blow!**

**"As lambs of the sacrifice we'll be to you,
To your banner, your sabre and to your horse
too,
And to its mane and its tail and its shoe!
Nazar the Brave, who fear does not know
Kills a thousand with a single blow!"**

**And as the drunken guests dispersed, they chanted
wherever they went,**

**"Nazar the Brave, who fear does not know,
Kills a thousand with a single blow!"**

**They told of his remarkable exploits and described
his fierce appearance. And people began to name
their newborn Nazar.**

Nazar left the wedding feast and continued on his way. Coming to a green meadow, he dismounted, set his horse loose to graze, stuck his flag in the ground, and lay down to sleep under it.

Now it so happened that in castle on the top of a neighbouring mountain there lived seven Giant warrior brothers. Looking down from their castle, they were amazed to see someone sleeping in their field.

"Who can be so brave and strong as to dare to trespass on our land, and even sleep on it? they wondered. And taking their enormous clubs they went down to the field to see who the trespasser could be. They arrived to find a horse grazing, and a man asleep on the ground beneath a banner, bearing the words:

"Nazar the Brave, who fear does not know,
Kills a thousand with a single blow!"

"Aha! So it's Nazar the Brave himself!" they exclaimed in awed tones, for the news spread by the drunken wedding guests had travelled thus far. And they stood rooted to the spot, waiting for Nazar to awake.

When Nazar woke up and saw the seven Giants standing over him with their enormous clubs, he nearly died of fright, and tried to hide behind the pole of his banner. Seeing him pale and quivering





the Giants thought he was enraged and about to finish them all off with one fell blow, so they fell to their knees, crying.

"O Nazar the Brave, who knows no fear! We have heard such a lot about you, and we are indeed honoured by your visit. Our castle is on yonder mountain. We have a very beautiful sister, who lives there with us. We beg you to come to our castle, and be our guest!"

Nazar recovered his wits and mounted his horse, and the seven Giants, carrying his banner, escorted him to their castle.

There they received him with great honours, and so extolled his courage and manly virtues that their sister, the beautiful Iar, straightway fell in love with him. Nazar's star was certainly in the ascendant, and honour and respect in which he was held continued to increase.

5

At that time a great savage tiger appeared in the region. Everybody in the neighbourhood was terrified, and people asked each other, "Who will rid us of this terrible tiger? Why, Nazar the Brave, of course. Who else will dare face the beast?"

All eyes were turned to Nazar: as God was in heaven, so was Nazar the Brave on the earth.

When Nazar heard the word "tiger", he was so scared that he ran away, his one idea to get home as fast as his legs would carry him. But everyone decided he had run off to kill the tiger with his bare hands, and his beautiful bride called after him:

"Stop, stop my hero! Do not go unarmed!"

Weapons were brought out to him, and armed to the teeth, Nazar mounted his horse and galloped away. He didn't know or care where he went; all he wanted was to get as far away as possible. Coming to a forest, he sprang from his horse and climbed a tree, thinking he would be safer there. He clung to a bough, more dead than alive from terror, his heart pounding wildly. As luck would have it, the tiger came along and lay down under that very tree. When Nazar saw the tiger, his blood froze, and everything went dark before his eyes. His arms grew weak, and he lost his grip and came crashing down right onto the tiger's back.

The beast was so surprized that it jumped up in panic and raced away over hills and vales, with Nazar clinging on to its back for dear life. The people who saw them cried:

"See! Nazar the Brave has tamed the tiger, and is riding it like a horse!,"

They all grabbed their daggers, their guns, and their swords, and run down and killed the tiger.

Recovering his wits Nazar found his tongue again and said:

"What a pity you killed the beast! I had just tamed him. I wanted to use him instead of a horse."

The news spread far and wide in no time at all, and they gave him a great reception in the castle. They sang an ode to his glory which ran:

"In all creation
In any nation
Who is your equal, who's not your salve
O Nazar the Brave?

"A fork of lightning
A hawk striking
You darted down our people to save
O Nazar the Brave!

"A tiger you coursed
As though t'were a horse
And rode on its back o'er hill and o'er vale
O Nazar the Brave!

"A saviour! You freed us!
O saviour! Now heed us!
Forever we'll praise thee, forever to save!
O Nazar the Brave!"

Nazar the Brave married the Giant's sister, and the wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights. Songs were sung in his praise, and in praise of his bride.



“The moon arose behind the hill
Whom does it resemble?
The moon arose behind the hill
It's Nazar the Brave himself!

**"The sun arose in all its glory
Whom does it resemble?
The sun in all its glory
It's Nazar the Brave's fair bride.**

**"Lo, our noble king so fair!
Lo, his shining sun so fair!
His crown is bright — brightest bright!
His robes are bright — brightest bright!
His belt is bright — brightest bright!
His boots are bright — brightest bright!
His Queen is bright — brightest bright!
We bow down to thee bright Queen,
O sun of the most bright King!
We pay homage to thee — all hail!**

**"Nazar the Brave! All hail! All hail!
And thee fair Queen — All hail! All hail!
And the whole wide world — All hail! All hail"**

That wasn't all.

It so happened that the King of the neighbouring country had wanted to marry the Giant's sister himself, and when he heard that the Giants had given her in marriage to Nazar, he declared war on them and sent out his armies to attack their castle.

The Giants came to Nazar and told him about the

war. Then bowing low, they stood before him awaiting his command.

As soon as Nazar heard the word "war", he dashed out of the castle, his one idea to get back home as fast as his legs would carry him. Everybody thought he wanted to attack the enemy single-handed and unarmed, and barred his way, begging him to stop, and arm himself first.

Weapons were brought, while his wife implored her brothers not let him go out and engage the enemy army single-handed. The news that Nazar the Brave had wanted to attack the enemy single-handed and unarmed had already spread everywhere. The whole people and the army had heard and scouts had brought word of it to the enemy forces. Now he was reported to have set out surrounded by the seven Giants.

On reaching the battlefield he was made to mount a large black charger, and all the soldiers shouted:

"Long live Nazar the Brave! Death to the enemy!?"

The charger felt that the man on his back was a pretty poor horseman, so he took the bit in his teeth and bolted straight for the enemy lines. The Giants and all their warriors thought that Nazar was charging the enemy without waiting for support, and charged after him with triumphant cries. Unable to restrain his steed, Nazar reached out and clutched the branch of a tree as he galloped past, hoping to swing himself out of the saddle. But the tree happened to

be dry and rotten, and the branch broke off, and there he was, galloping towards the enemy with an enormous branch in his hands.

When the enemy saw this, demoralized as they were by his great renown, they turned and fled, crying, "Run for your lives! Nazar the Brave is charging us, tearing up trees by the roots as he comes!"

Many of the enemy were slaughtered that day and those who remained alive lay down their arms at Nazar's feet and swore allegiance to him.

Nazar the Brave was escorted back to the Giant's castle amid great rejoicing. The people erected triumphal arches in his honour and gave him tumultuous welcome, with cries of "hurrah" and "long live Nazar the Brave", music and singing, and countless speeches, so that Nazar was quite overwhelmed by it all.

After this great victory, Nazar was proclaimed King, and mounted the throne amid great pomp and ceremony. The seven Giants were appointed as his advisers. And he saw that the world was at his feet.

They say that Nazar the Brave still reigns there to this day. And when people speak of valour, intelligence or talent in his presence, he laughs and says:

"What valour!? What intelligence!? What talent!? These all are empty words. It's a question of luck. If you're lucky—make merry!"

And they say that to this day Nazar the Brave is making merry and laughing at the whole world.



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Nazar the Brave

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